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ABSTRACT

This study describes a program for improving student's reading skills. The targeted population consisted of students in a self-contained inclusion fourth grade classroom in a rural community, located in the Midwest. The lack of reading skills had been demonstrated through standardized achievement tests and the Developmental Reading Assessment. Analysis of probable cause data revealed many students lacked grade level reading achievement, which included low reading comprehension, word knowledge, and meaning vocabulary. Reviews of research revealed students were not receiving sufficient instruction time and teachers were not using effective reading strategies. A review of solution strategies suggested implementing the Four-Block Framework resulting in an increase in student's reading achievement. Instruction was accomplished by using Guided Reading, Writing, Self-Selected Reading, and Working with Words. Post intervention data indicated students made gains in the areas of reading comprehension, reading out loud, and sounding out words. Children displayed increased motivation during classroom activities and a new appreciation for literature. Appendixes include: Pre-Questionnaire; Information Chart; Problem-Solving Chart; Important Elements; Sequence Chart; Information Web; and Post-Questionnaire. Published materials in the appendixes include: "You Don't Look Beautiful to Me" DRA Observation Guide/Level 28, DRA Record of Oral Reading, DRA Comprehension Rubric, and "What's Next? Focus for Instruction" (Upper Arlington Schools 1996-1997/Published by Celebration Press); "Animals Galore" (Carson-Dellosa CD-2606); and "Story Plan Sheet" (Evan-Moor Corporation "Writing Activities Sampler" EMC 053, 1999). (Contains 25 references and 6 figures.) (Author/RS)

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ED 471 575

Improving Student Reading Skills Through The Use of Guided Reading

Suzanne Conklin
Katherine Wilkins

An Action Research Project Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the

School of Education in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in Teaching and Leadership

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Abstract

This study describes a program for improving student's reading skills. The targeted population consisted of students in a self-contained inclusion fourth grade classroom in a rural community, located in the Midwest. The lack of reading skills had been demonstrated through standardized achievement tests and the Developmental Reading Assessment.

Analysis of probable cause data revealed many students lacked grade level reading achievement, which included low reading comprehension, word knowledge, and meaning vocabulary. Reviews of research revealed students were not receiving sufficient instruction time and teachers were not using effective reading strategies.

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Post intervention data indicated students made gains in the areas of reading comprehension, reading out loud, and sounding out words. Children displayed increased motivation during classroom activities and a new appreciation for literature.

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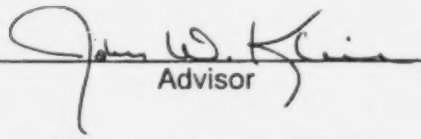

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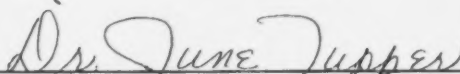

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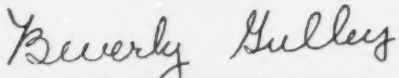

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CHAPTER 1

PROBLEM STATEMENT AND CONTEXT

General Statement of the Problem

The students of the targeted fourth grade inclusion title class exhibited below grade level reading abilities that limited their academic growth. Evidence for the existence of the problem included low Stanford test scores, low standardized achievement test scores, low developmental reading assessment (DRA), and teacher assessments that indicated below grade level reading abilities.

Immediate Problem Context

This action research took place in a fourth grade inclusion classroom where regular education students, Title I students, and special education students had been placed.

Student Demographics

The total enrollment of the site was 439 students, and the average class size was 20 students. The population consisted of 97.9% Caucasian, 0.9% African American, 0.9% Hispanic, and 0.2% Asian or Pacific Islander. Students from low-income families made up 27.3% of the student population. The mobility rate was 11.4% with a truancy rate of 1.7%. The attendance rate was 95.3%. The

student to certified teacher ratio at the site was 17.8 to 1 (School Report Card, 2000).

Faculty and Staff

All of the staff members at the targeted site were Caucasian. There were 18 classroom teachers, 5 special educators, and 1 teacher paraprofessional. There were 23 female teachers and 1 male teacher in the building full time. Two male physical education teachers and a female speech pathologist were shared within the district. A male teacher provided music for kindergarten through third grade, while a female teacher provides music and band for fourth through sixth grade. There were two Title I teachers who provided services to children who were at risk in reading and to children who were gifted. There was also a school psychologist, school social worker, and special education coordinator, who were shared throughout the district. The office staff consisted of one secretary and two office assistants. The office also had the female school administrator and a part time female guidance counselor.

The average teaching experience for a classroom teacher was 16.6 years. While many of the teachers in the targeted school had accumulated graduate hours, two had earned a master's degree. The average teacher's salary was $37,837, and the average administrator's salary was $63,979 (School Report Card, 2000).

Building Description

The targeted site was a third through sixth grade one story brick school built in 1998. The building contained four sections of third and fourth grade and

five sections of fifth and sixth grade. Each grade had a special education classroom. The third and fourth grade classrooms were in the north wing of the building. The fifth and sixth grade classrooms could be found in the south wing of the school. The office, cafeteria, and gymnasium were centrally located for the convenience of all grade levels. The fine arts rooms were situated in the southeast corner of the building. The library and technology lab were positioned in the west section of the school.

Classroom Description

The targeted classroom was a fourth grade self-contained classroom located in the north wing of the building. One regular education teacher and one special education teacher provided instruction. A grade level assistant worked individually with the students who needed additional help. Services were provided to students with disabilities in areas designated on their Individualized Education Plan (IEP) in the classroom with a pull-out program for reading instruction. Five students also received services from the Title I teacher.

The arrangement of desks in five groups of four allowed the students to work in cooperative groups. There were three computers situated on a table on the west wall of the classroom. The computers were used to supplement the students' learning in math, reading, and language. The reading center was tucked in a corner of the classroom with books of all reading levels for the students to enjoy. A couch, rug, and beanbags filled this area to allow students to relax. A word wall was located above the computer table to aid the students with their writing. A job chart was posted for the students to share classroom

responsibilities and was rotated weekly. There were two gerbils, an aquarium, and plants that added interest to the classroom. There were two windows on the north side of the classroom that looked out to a densely wooded area.

Program Description

The targeted site was a self-contained inclusion classroom. The academic subjects taught were reading, language, spelling, math, science, and social studies. Students were pretested and grouped by ability each chapter in math and placed with a fourth grade teacher. Social skills were taught twice a month to incorporate the school's character education program. Computer skills were gained from the technology teacher 30 minutes each week. Students received art instruction once a week; music, twice a week; and physical education, three times each week. The students visited the library once a week to check out library books and received library education. To increase the student's reading ability, the Accelerated Reader Program (ARP), 600 Minutes, and Book-It were implemented. Parents were kept abreast of their children's activities in the classroom and school with a weekly newsletter. Parents were also invited to volunteer in the classroom.

The school provided a before and after school daycare program to aid the many working parents in the community. The school offered breakfast and lunch to the students. Students from low income families could receive free or reduced breakfast and lunch. The school had implemented a student assistance program (SAP) to identify students who needed adaptations made in the classroom. The SAP team consisted of a group of teachers from all grade levels. The students

could attend homework help sessions, after school, twice a week for academic assistance. Summer school was offered four weeks before school starts, to students who were at risk, to review skills before the start of a new year. A variety of community and school sponsored sports including cheerleading, volleyball, basketball, football, wrestling, swimming, soccer, softball, baseball, and cross country were offered for the students' participation.

Surrounding Community

The targeted site was a Midwestern rural community with a population of 2,299 that served as the county seat. Within the community there was a national historical site. Many parks provided recreation for the residents of the community. There was a medical facility located in the community and a public library was situated in the heart of the town. Public administration, retail, and health services were the main sources of income for many families. Finance, insurance, real estate, education, and construction also provided employment for citizens. Many other opportunities for employment could be found 25 minutes away in the state capital (U.S. Census Bureau, 1990).

The school district's total enrollment was 1,499 students (School Report Card, 2000). Five communities comprised the school district. One of the communities provided education to students in prekindergarten through fourth grade. The remainder of the students were serviced in the largest community within the district. An elementary school, a middle school, a junior high school, and a high school made up the unit district. There were four administrators within

the district. One administrator presided over the two elementary schools. The remaining buildings were serviced with one administrator each.

The median family income of the community was $28,906. There were 54 families that existed below poverty level in the community. There were 109 families in the community with no husband present, which contained 68 school aged students (U.S. Census Bureau, 1990). Some of the families resided in one of the three federal housing complexes. The community provided support to the schools due to the large number of at-risk students. There was a community mentoring program that linked at-risk students with a mentor allowing the students to have positive role models and experience new activities. There were also AmeriCorp volunteers who worked one on one with students to help enrich their lives.

National Context of the Problem

> According to the most recent National Assessment of Educational Progress, 44% of U.S. students in elementary and high school read below the basic level, meaning they exhibit little or no mastery of the knowledge and skills necessary to perform work at each grade level. About 20 percent of elementary children are characterized as having serious reading difficulty, and many more find reading laborious and unrewarding (Hall & Moats, 1999, p.3-4).

Teachers need to encourage students to understand the importance of reading in everyday life. Children across the nation are scoring below average on reading assessment tests. Recently, fewer than half of New York state's 4th graders

made the grade on a new literacy test administered in January 1999 ("America Reads", 2001). Fountas and Pinnell (2001) also found the following:

> A study of fourth graders revealed that students that read fluently and who reported reading at home also scored higher on standardized reading achievement tests. Students in the higher achievement groups were reading many more words per day, more minutes per day, and more hours per week than the students in the lower achievement groups, who spent very little time reading very few words. (p.2)

Teachers need to arouse students' interests and strengthen students' strengths by reading together (Dombey, as cited in Wang, 2000). By using a variety of teaching techniques, teachers can reach students at all learning levels. (Cunningham, 2000). If students are to succeed in life, they must achieve a level of reading that will enable them to reach their goals (Hall and Moats, 1999). "It has long been known that children with a history of listening to stories during the early years have better developed language skills and better reading comprehension than do children without such a history" (Schickedanz, 1999, p.54). "Through the support, guidance, and encouragement of teachers and parents, children can experience success and enjoy reading, and children can build their confidence in reading" (Wang, 2000, p.5).

CHAPTER 2

PROBLEM DOCUMENTATION

Problem Evidence

In order to document the extent of below grade level reading abilities, scores from state and local assessment tests were reviewed. Students who were to be placed in the inclusion classroom were those who had an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) and students who were designated as Title I students. To determine this placement, students who scored a one or two on the local assessment, qualified for Title I service. The students also qualified for Title I service if they did not meet test criteria for state testing. In this classroom, there were three students with an IEP and five who received Title I services.

Of the 23 students in the class, 21 students were involved in testing over the two-week period. A pretreatment questionnaire (Appendix A) was developed by the teacher researchers to identify students' reading habits and interests. When given the question, "Do you ever like to read?" 20 students replied yes, and 1 student responded no. When asked, "Does anyone listen to you read?" 11 students responded yes, and 10 answered no. After discussing reading at home with the students, the researchers observed that the majority of parents are not

reading with their children. The questionnaire provided an idea of what types of literature needed to be offered in the classroom.

The students were questioned about the frequency of their reading for pleasure or school work, at school and at home. The 21 students indicated they read at school and at home. Eleven students responded positively to reading at school, while seven replied they enjoyed reading daily at home and at school. Researchers linked the amount of time spent reading at home to the number of students who enjoyed reading at home. Figure 1 shows the students' responses to their daily reading activities.

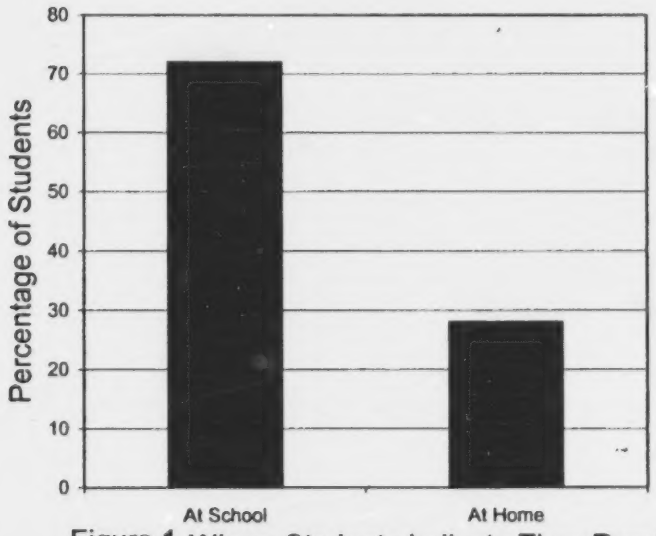

Figure 1 Where Students Indicate They Read

Students were also able to identify areas of strengths and weaknesses in reading on the pretreatment questionnaire. The following were the choices given to students: reading out loud, understanding what you read, sounding out new

words, reading quickly, reading to yourself, reading to others, and other reading opportunities. The researchers noted students felt successful reading to themselves and understanding what they had read. Pupils indicated weaknesses in the areas of reading aloud and reading with fluency. Figure 2 details the strengths and weaknesses.

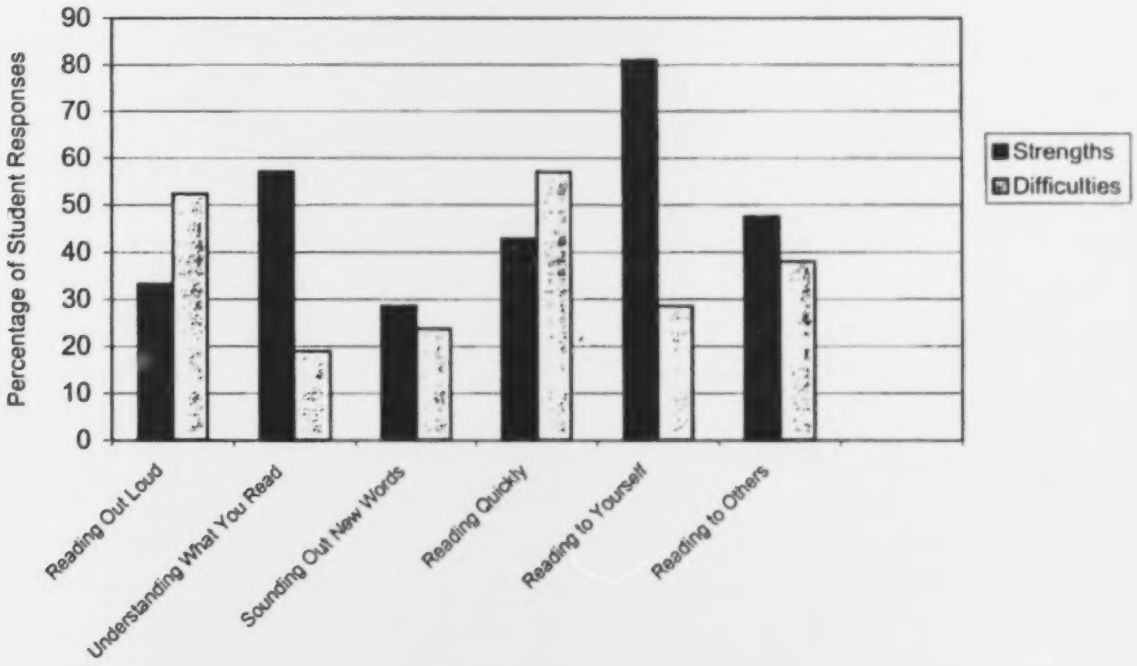

Figure 2 Student Self-ratings of Their Daily Reading Activities

The DRA was administered to determine each student's reading ability. The first part of the test required students to use predicting skills by reading a small section of the story. The students continued by reading the story independently. When students had finished reading the story, the researcher asked the student to retell the story in his or her own words. The test allowed the

asked the student to retell the story in his or her own words. The test allowed the researcher to record key elements of the story as retold by the student. Students were also asked to identify the following elements: characters, important details, vocabulary and special phrases from story, setting, events in sequence, and the ending. Other questions included inferences and open-ended response questions.

Next, the researchers listened to students read an excerpt from the story orally. On a score sheet (Appendix B), researchers recorded what words students self- corrected, omitted, inserted, and had to be told. Students were given a chance to let the researcher know reading preferences. The one-on-one dialogue between researcher and student provided a comfortable environment in which students could express themselves.

Researchers looked at the observation guide to determine text level at which each student was reading. Levels ranged from 18 to 44. Level 18 placed the students at an early second grade reading level and level 44 placed students at a mid-fourth grade level. Out of 21 students, 2 read at level 18, 1 at level 20, 4 at level 28, 1 at level 30, 4 at level 38, 4 at level 40, and 5 at level 44.

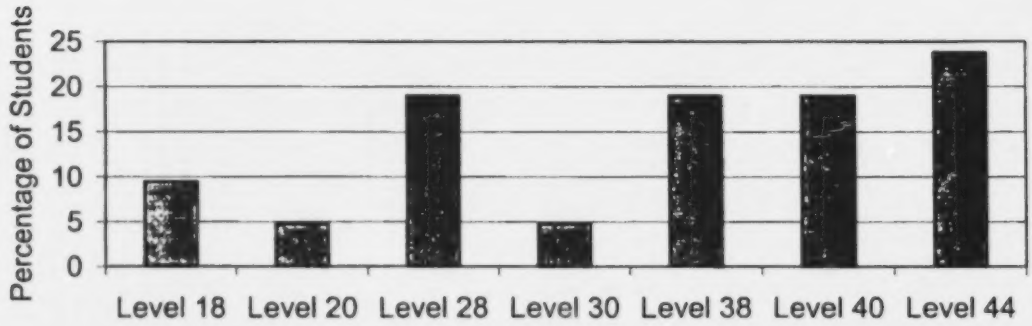

Figure 3 Developmental Reading Assessment Levels

Three instruments were used to score and target skills each student needed to improve upon throughout the implementation period. The first tool was the DRA Continuum (Appendix C). It was used after the pretest to track each student and to make sure each individual was placed at an appropriate reading level. The DRA Continuum determined whether students were early readers, transitional readers, or extended readers. The book selection, sustained reading, previewing and predicting, oral reading, use of reading strategies, and comprehension were the criteria used in placing students on the DRA Continuum.

The second instrument was the What's Next checklist (Appendix D). After the pretest, researchers used this chart to identify skills on which each child needed to work and to direct further teacher instruction. Reading skills focused on areas of book selection, sustained reading and comprehension. Teachers guided students to select books at their reading level they could comprehend and enjoy during sustained reading time. The checklist also focused on previewing

literature, predicting outcomes, oral reading and use of strategies to understand what they read. Specific areas were identified to guide the teacher in instruction for each individual student. Teacher researchers targeted reading skills most important for each student. There were variations in what students needed to concentrate on. The main areas students needed to focus on were comprehension, previewing and use of strategies. Some students had many areas of concentration as others had few.

The third measure used was the recording of standardized local test scores. These tests were reviewed for each student placed in the classroom. Reading skills falling below grade level were documented for improvement throughout the implementation period. Some skills students needed to develop were word study skills, word reading and reading comprehension.

After recording the three measures the researchers concluded students needed more instructional time in reading. Along with more time, students need educated teachers to guide them to read books on their reading level. Reading skills in the areas of guided reading, teacher read-alouds, sustained silent reading and word attack strategies would also benefit the students.

Probable Causes

An analysis of the probable causes indicated students lacked reading abilities due to insufficient instruction time, limited use of reading strategies, and employment of inappropriate reading materials. Students lacked confidence because they were not having positive experiences with books; poor attitudes towards reading were expressed at home. Evidence of the listed probable

causes was found at the targeted site as well as in the literature review. After talking to previous grade level teachers, evidence showed that students lacked confidence due to poor reading skills. At the targeted site, students were falling below grade level on standardized testing and were not meeting the reading standards set for the grade level. Students at the site were between the ages of nine and eleven years old. Children had been placed in an inclusion fourth grade class through teacher recommendation and standardized test scores determining the appropriate placement for the students.

The literature suggested students are receiving insufficient instruction time in reading. Professionals who developed the four blocks framework believe students must be given daily exposure in reading for students to be successful (Cunningham, 1999). The framework combines reading and writing in the same instructional period. Allocating three hours of continuous time is important for students to make connections between reading and writing. Independent reading time, where students read individually and silently, should be implemented daily for students to keep momentum (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001).

While teachers are knowledgeable, they are not implementing effective reading strategies in the classroom. Teachers should plan a balanced reading program. Instructors need to focus on instruction that incorporates numerous strategies for reading, which include direct skill instruction. Another strategy is teacher directed instruction in comprehension, which includes modeling and guided practice. Pearson (as cited in Diamond & Mandel, 1995) suggested summarizing, predicting, and building vocabulary as ways to provide students a

good foundation in reading. Strategies can be taught through the use of a variety of materials, such as reading basals, leveled trade books, graphic organizers and word wall.

At present students are being placed in reading basals and novels they are unable to read and comprehend. Students cannot become better readers if they cannot read from the books in which they are given. The foundation of the four-block framework strategy is based on students being offered books at appropriate reading levels.

Students need to know that reading is important outside of school. Giving students opportunities to go to the library is a way for parents to emphasize the importance of reading. Parents can help children see the importance of reading by modeling good reading skills at home. Reading to children at a young age also instills good reading habits and provides models for children to want to learn how to read. Parental summaries of the stories help children understand the text and the opportunity to enjoy quality time with parents (Wang, 2000). Parents should believe children have the ability to read.

Parents who have a poor attitude toward reading can pass that attitude on to their children. Well-educated parents tend to be are more interested in books, giving their children the advantage of reading books at home. Parents, who do not like to read and do not buy books for their children, are not providing a favorable climate for reading. Children need consistent support from school and home to encourage reading. Established routines, such as daily reading at home for 30 minutes a night, will help provide momentum for continued reading

(Fountas and Pinnell, 2001). Reading aloud becomes a part of the person's family heritage. Children who are read to will read to their children. When a child is read to, the magic of reading is handed down (Cullinan, 1992).

Teachers can offer students positive contacts with books by modeling reading for them. Students, who enjoy listening to read alouds, experience a high impact on early reading achievement. Through direct instruction, teachers model reading techniques so students feel comfortable applying the reading strategies to their independent reading. Through the guided reading, students learn to enjoy positive reading activities, such as previewing and predicting, shared partner reading, small group discussions, literature circles, musical riddles, and graphic organizers (Musick, 2001).

Many children lack confidence in reading. This is a result of not being able to read at grade level due to a learning disability or lack of reading tools. The teacher researchers believe that when students are placed in classrooms where they are not given an opportunity to read books on their reading level, they become easily frustrated and they feel unsuccessful in reading class. Teachers can guide students by providing books at appropriate reading levels and by changing the way reading is taught. Students respond like good readers by rereading books they have previously read with the teacher.

Based on the literature and information obtained from the site, educators correlate students' lack of reading ability to insufficient time in reading, use of poor reading strategies, and limited reading materials available. Textbooks that are poorly written do not allow students to comprehend information, making it

difficult for students to learn (Knuth & Jones, 1991). Literature also suggests students who do not have a rich literacy environment at home tend to lack confidence in reading (Duke, 2001). "Through the support, guidance, and encouragement of teachers and parents, children can experience success and enjoy reading, and children can build their confidence in reading" (Wang, 2000, para. 20).

Chapter 3

THE SOLUTION STRATEGY

Literature Review

Current research regarding reading indicates a need for teachers to implement new strategies and techniques for teaching reading in the classrooms. Stoicheva (1999) stated teachers need to use a balanced literacy program while teaching reading so that all students' needs are met. The four-block literacy model is a framework created by teachers for teachers. The four blocks are guided reading, self-selected reading, writing, and working with words. By using different approaches daily, one can reach the reading styles of all students. The model, "...provides additional support for children who struggle and additional challenges for children who catch on quickly" (Cunningham, 2000, p.17).

To develop good comprehension skills, students should be questioning while they read. Teachers must supply adequate time for students to comprehend what they are reading (Fielding & Pearson, 1994). Students need to be thinking about what they read and what is going to come next in the literature. Children should be able to summarize and retell the stories they have read in their own words (Hall & Moats, 1999). There are many strategies that help students to comprehend what they read, including previewing the book,

predicting, thinking aloud, and sequencing. These strategies can be accomplished by teacher directed instruction with the use of graphic organizers. While reading a variety of materials, teachers can concentrate on the advanced teaching skills, such as summarizing, questioning, and visualizing (Diamond & Mandel, 1996). In planning each child's literacy needs, the teacher needs to be knowledgeable of which strategies the children are lacking (Morris, 2001). Comprehension is being able to understand what you have read. In order to comprehend from a text, students need to be able to identify words in it. Even though students are able to read all the words in the text, it does not mean they are able to comprehend it (Cunningham, 2000). Comprehension can be achieved when the reader uses strategies while interacting with the reading material (Knuth & Jones 1991). "Comprehension requires active thinking, and without comprehension, reading is pointless. Indeed, reading without understanding is not even reading in the true sense of the word" (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001, p. 328).

Developing background knowledge in all children is important so that they can relate to what they read. "A good store house of background knowledge is essential if children are to be good readers. It clearly helps children comprehend what they read" (Schnickedanz, 1999, p.65). Events we experience in our life help us to get meaning from text, to reach beyond the meaning, and to use the new found knowledge in everyday life (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001). Wang (2000) states that having strong background knowledge will help students develop good comprehension skills. Personal experiences of the students can help develop new vocabulary in the classroom. Through the use of this vocabulary, students

will learn the meaning of words to form analogies (Smith, 1997). Rereading literature allows the students to recognize high frequency words, helps to promote literacy, and creates stronger readers (Blau, 1990). To help develop basic skills, teachers need to provide an environment that is rich in all areas of literature (Aiex, 2001).

Teaching children to read all types of literature is important for well-rounded readers. Blau (1990) instructed teachers to carefully choose selections and offer a variety of genres, such as poetry, speeches, folk and fairy tales that will interest students. Poetry introduces students to the appreciation of the sound and the imagery of language while inviting students to discover words and rhythm (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001). Duke (2001) noted some adults think only storybooks are appropriate for children, but nonfiction can stimulate students' interest in reading if they care about the topic. The use of newspapers in the classroom is a good tool for students. "Reading newspapers keeps children in touch with the world around them and reinforces valuable literacy skills, such as comprehension and vocabulary" ("New Books", 2000). Also frequently used in classrooms are the Weekly Reader and magazines, which have current news.

Routinely self-selected reading begins with a teacher reading aloud to the students using a variety of books. Trelease (1984) compared read aloud books and readers to fishing rods and fish as a good book should have a hook to catch readers. Dombey (as cited in Wang, 2000) described how teachers need to read to young students so their needs can be met, interest can be emphasized, and strengths can be enhanced. Fountas and Pinnell (2001) stated that when

teachers read aloud, they demonstrate a love for literature and model good reading habits for students. By hearing reading out loud, students gain information, develop fluency, hear expressive reading, and hear text above their reading level. Research by The National Assessment of Educational Progress (1997) stated reading ability in children is related to the amount of time they have spent reading for pleasure. Students should be given a variety of books at all reading levels to choose from at school and at home to increase their interest in reading.

Giving students time to practice reading is very beneficial. Tutors can be enlisted to listen to the students read. Any positive role model that creates a comfortable environment for the students to relax and read helps the students develop better reading skills and boost their self-esteem. The tutors can be aides, parents, grandparents, community members, or older students in the school. Positive feedback about children's reading from teachers, peers, and parents makes children confident in reading. Blau (1990) recommended that by offering positive feedback or instructing students to reread areas they have struggled with, the tutor provides one-on-one interaction. Gersten (as cited by Viadero, 2000) believed students with tutors have success because they have spent more time reading.

Students should be given time to read silently. Teachers should model reading, and parents should also. Fountas and Pinnell (2001) stated that when students have read silently, they can concentrate better on meaning, remember information, and easily find information in the text. Students can be given 10

minutes a day to read silently, which in a week will result in 50 minutes of reading time that they would not have been given otherwise. This gives students an opportunity to get involved in a book, an activity which they might not have chosen on their own time (Trelease, 1984).

Motivated and self-confident students learn more easily. Thus, teachers need to maintain their motivation. Cunningham (2001) offered activities such as acting out plays, musical riddles, reader's theater, and choral reading. Partner reading is also offered because it boosts their self-esteem, and they feel less threatened reading to a peer. Opitz (1999) suggested that paired reading provides students with beneficial reading practice while developing their fluency skills. Ten minutes a day of paired reading allows struggling readers to improve fluency (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001). Vaughn (as cited by Duke, 2001) noted that pairing a struggling reader with a stronger reader could help both readers receive positive attention. The struggling reader should be given opportunities to be the tutor, instead of always being the tutee. Being the tutor can empower the student, thus boosting the student's self-esteem.

Working with words as described by Cunningham (2000) has three goals: teaching children to recognize, read and spell high-frequency words, teaching decoding and spelling by using patterns, and using phonics. These can be accomplished by daily practice of reviewing words on a word wall, The word wall can be displayed in the classroom for all students to be able to see during reading and writing activities. The students practice the words daily by looking at them, saying them, and spelling them. Also, to incorporate patterning and

phonics, students participate in an activity called making big words. Students join the teacher while whole group instruction is given by making words with manipulative letters. The class makes words and patterns. Then, as the culminating activity, the students use all the letters to make a big word. Wordo is a fun bingo activity for students to practice words from the word wall. This allows students to familiarize themselves with the words while playing a game at the same time. Cloze techniques can be used to guide the students through a reading passage. Cloze procedure is deleting words within the text and having students use context clues to figure out what words are missing (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001). These activities reach students within a wide range of levels.

Daily writing in the classroom is a powerful tool for learning that can take many different forms. Journal writing is a technique teachers can use to communicate back and forth with their students. By writing in daily correspondence journals, teachers and students develop a personal relationship, which creates trust. Brillman (1999) said that journal writing has two benefits: students will share their lives, knowing that what they write will be confidential, and students will improve writing skills. There are many different types of journals available. An I Wonder journal, as shared by Musick (2001), can be used to stimulate students' minds by having them write questions to items they may answer later. Journals can be used in conjunction with guided reading, so students can write down summaries, main ideas, and vocabulary found in the story.

Daily oral language provides students with the opportunity to practice grammar skills routinely. Students are given sentences, small paragraphs, and addresses written incorrectly. It is their job to correct the misspellings and improper word usage, while also supplying proper punctuation. The purpose of daily oral language is to maintain both old and new skills through practice and reinforcement (Vail and Papenfuss, 1989). To practice the writing process, teachers should incorporate writing centers in the classroom (Musick, 2001). By offering a variety of centers, teachers can reach students at all levels. Musick suggested starting with textless books and having the student be the author. Students could then progress to being the author and illustrator of their own literature. "The most important thing we can do to support children's beginning efforts at writing is provide materials" (Schnickedanz, 1999, p.71). A writing center should be supplied with a variety of materials, such as pencils, markers, alphabet stamps, computers, paper, stationary, envelopes, old magazines, and pictures.

Project Objectives and Processes

As a result of the implementation of the four-block framework, during the period of September 2001 to January 2002, the fourth grade students of the targeted class will increase their reading ability as measured by the Developmental Reading Assessment. In order to accomplish the project objectives, the following processes are necessary:

1. To teach comprehension skills and strategies

2. To develop background knowledge, meaning vocabulary, and oral language
3. To teach children how to read all types of literature
4. To provide as much instructional-level reading as possible
5. To maintain the motivation and self-confidence of struggling readers
6. To provide children with writing opportunities
7. To guide children in self-selected reading materials
8. To engage children in working with words

Project Action Plan

Two teachers, a regular education teacher and a special education teacher, will implement the research with a fourth grade class. The research will begin the week of September 4th and will conclude the week of January 18th. The research is being conducted to increase the students' reading achievement by using the four-block framework.

Weeks 1, 2 & 3

Guided Reading: During these weeks the students will preview literature with picture walks, predict and think aloud, and begin using graphic organizers with their literature. Teacher-directed instruction will be given in small groups, literature circles will be implemented, and students will begin working on sequencing. The students will study synonyms, antonyms, homonyms, contractions, vowels, and consonants. The teachers will introduce the students to using the Weekly Reader. To motivate the students, the class will engage in musical riddles.

Writing: During these weeks, daily oral language, the daily correspondence journal, and the message center will begin.

Self-Selected Reading: Using a variety of books, students will be given time to enjoy sustained silent reading, will listen to teacher read-alouds, and will be given time to read to adults.

Working with Words: Students will work with words by engaging in word wall activities, making big words, playing Wordo, and practice the cloze procedure.

Weeks 4, 5 & 6

Guided Reading: The students will continue previewing literature with picture walks, predicting and thinking aloud, using graphic organizers, and working in small groups and literature circles. The class will conclude their work on vowels and consonants, synonyms, antonyms, and homonyms. The students will continue to use the Weekly Reader and will begin partner reading.

Writing: The class will continue daily oral language activities and the daily correspondence journal. Implementation of the guided reading journal and I wonder journal will take place. The students will be given the opportunity to use the message center and experience the textless books center.

Self-Selected Reading: Using a variety of books, students will be given time to enjoy reader's choice, will listen to teacher read-alouds, and will be given time to read to adults.

Working with Words: Students will work with words by engaging in word wall activities, making big words, playing Wordo, and practicing using the cloze procedure.

Weeks 7, 8 & 9

Guided Reading: The students will continue previewing literature with picture walks, predicting and thinking aloud, using graphic organizers, and working in small groups and literature circles. The class will begin working on plural words, using dictionary skills, and rereading books. The students will engage in activities with the Weekly Reader. Participation in choral readings will occur.

Writing: During these weeks the students will continue with daily oral language and writing in their journals. In addition, the students will begin writing and drawing throughout their reading process and participate in writing weekly newsletter articles for their class.

Self-Selected Reading: Using a variety of books, students will be given time to enjoy sustained silent reading, will listen to teacher read-alouds, and will be given time to read to adults.

Working with Words: Students will work with words by engaging in word wall activities, making big words, playing Wordo, and practicing using the cloze procedure.

Weeks 10, 11 & 12

Guided Reading: The students will continue previewing literature with picture walks, predicting and thinking aloud, using graphic organizers, and

working in small groups and literature circles. The students will continue working with dictionary skills and begin parts of speech. The students will continue to engage in different types of literature using the Weekly Reader and choral readings.

Writing: During these weeks the students will continue daily oral language, journal writings, will write and draw throughout their reading process, will participate in writing weekly newsletter articles for their class, will become sentence and paragraph detectives, and will create greeting cards.

Self-Selected Reading: Using a variety of books, students will be given time to enjoy reader's choice, will listen to teacher read-alouds, will be given time to read to adults, and will be given the opportunity to share with classmates books they have read during this time.

Working with Words: Students will work with words by engaging in word wall activities, making big words, playing Wordo, and practicing using the cloze procedure.

Weeks 13, 14 & 15

Guided Reading: The students will continue previewing literature with picture walks, predicting and thinking aloud, using graphic organizers, and working in small groups and literature circles. The students will work on analogies and use poetry books to practice previously learned skills. The students will engage in the Weekly Reader, magazines, and reader's theater activities.

Writing: During these weeks the students will continue daily oral language, journal writings, will write and draw throughout their reading process, will participate in writing weekly newsletter articles for their class, will become sentence and paragraph detectives, and will create greeting cards.

Self-Selected Reading: Using a variety of books, students will be given time to enjoy sustained silent reading, will listen to teacher read-alouds, and will be given time to read to adults. Students will be given time to share books they have read with their classmates.

Working with Words: Students will work with words by engaging in word wall activities, making big words, playing Wordo, and practicing using the cloze procedure.

Weeks 16, 17 & 18

Guided Reading: The students will continue previewing literature with picture walks, predicting and thinking aloud, using graphic organizers, and working in small groups and literature circles. The students will work on analogies and use poetry books to practice previously learned skills. The students will engage in the Weekly Reader, magazines, and reader's theater activities. The students will perform plays they have learned to other classes.

Writing: During these weeks the students will continue daily oral language, journal writings, will write and draw throughout their reading process, will participate in writing weekly newsletter articles for their class, will become sentence and paragraph detectives. The writing center choices will be greeting cards and book making.

Self-Selected Reading: Using a variety of books, students will be given time to enjoy reader's choice, will listen to teacher read-alouds, and will be given time to read to adults.

Working with Words: Students will work with words by engaging in word wall activities, making big words, playing Wordo, and practicing using the cloze procedure.

Methods of Assessment

In order to assess the effects of the interventions, these assessment methods will be used:

1. A pre-questionnaire will be used the first week of school to give information on each student's reading habits and interests.
2. The Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA) will be used to pretest and posttest the students.
3. The DRA Comprehension Rubric will be used after pretesting and posttesting to determine each student's comprehension skills and to assess their skills throughout the research.
4. The DRA Continuum will be used to track each student and to make sure they are placed in an appropriate reading level throughout the research.
5. The What's Next checklist will be used to determine the skills each child needs on an individual basis.
6. A post-questionnaire will be used to assess growth and new interests from the students.

CHAPTER 4

PROJECT RESULTS

Historical Description of the Intervention

The objective of this project was to increase fourth grade students' reading achievement through the implementation of the Four-Block Framework. This framework includes guided reading, working with words, writing, and self-selected reading. During the research period, the researchers provided a variety of reading and language activities to the students during daily guided reading time. Teacher directed instruction was given in small groups and literature circles were implemented. The children were exposed to a variety of grammar and comprehension activities. Daily time was allotted for students to read silently and to listen to teachers reading aloud. Data was collected on each child in the study by using the Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA).

For the implementation process to begin, students completed a pretreatment questionnaire developed by researchers to identify students' reading habits and interests. Next, the researchers administered the DRA individually to each student. The results on the DRA placed the students at an appropriate reading level. The students were placed in groups according to their results on the DRA. The DRA Comprehension Rubric (Appendix I) was used to

determine each student's comprehension skills and to assess their skills throughout the research. The DRA Continuum (Appendix C) was used to track each student and to make sure they were placed in appropriate reading groups throughout the research. The What's Next checklist (Appendix D) was used to work on individualized skills.

The first block of the framework was guided reading. Students were given instruction in their Guided Reading groups for 30 minutes each day. Many reading and language skills were addressed during this time. Some examples were sequencing, predicting, synonyms, antonyms, homonyms, contractions, analogies, and vowels and consonants review. These skills were used with the literature that was being read by the small group. Teachers guided students through the literature with picture walks, and they used graphic organizers (Appendix J) to determine the students understanding of what was read. Students engaged in partner reading during this time. Weekly Readers were read once a week as a whole group to incorporate current events. Choral readings were practiced in small groups and presented to the class and a nursing home before Thanksgiving. Excluded from the original action plan were plays and reader's theatre due to lack of time.

The second block of the framework was writing. Writing activities were Daily Oral Language, journals, the message center, creating greeting cards, textless book center and essay writing. Each morning students participated in Daily Oral Language (Appendix). Students were given two grammatically incorrect sentences. Their job was to make corrections. Journals were used to

have students correspond with the teachers. It was our plan to do it daily, but time did not allow us to incorporate it every day. Students created greeting cards to share with someone important in their life. Also as a random act of kindness, the students wrote signs to spread joy throughout the school. The textless book center was changed from a center to an individual writing experience for one week. Each student selected a wordless book and wrote a story to correspond with the pictures. Students shared their stories with a partner. Essay writing was added to our action plan because it is required in fourth grade. Students were given weekly writing prompts to write narrative, persuasive, and expository essays.

The third block of the framework was self-selected reading. Using a variety of books, students were given time to enjoy sustained silent reading daily for thirty minutes. The classroom was arranged so students could enjoy reading on a couch, rugs, or pillows during this time. Students were given the opportunity each week to read out loud to an adult. Students listen to teachers read aloud novels. The novels we read were Stone Fox by John Reynolds Gardiner, Skinnybones by Barbara Park, Tales of the Fourth Grade Nothing by Judy Blume, Mouse and the Motorcycle by Beverly Cleary, and Snow Treasure by Marie McSwigan. After reading time each day, students took notes over what was read. This helped with comprehension questions and Accelerated Reader Program (ARP) tests required in fourth grade.

The fourth block of the framework was working with words. Students worked with words by engaging in word wall activities, making big words, playing

Wordo, and practicing using the cloze procedure. The word wall activities included the introduction of five new words each week. The word was placed up on the word wall. The students looked at the word, said the word, clapped their hands while spelling the word, and then wrote the word in their word wall folders (Appendix F). The making big words activity was presented as whole group instruction once a week. The teacher guided the students using letters on an overhead projector, while the students had their own letters to manipulate in front of them. As a whole group, the students brainstormed words that could be made with the letters in front of them. To culminate the activity, the students used all the letters to create the big word. Wordo was used to review the word wall words in a game format. The students were given a blank Wordo board (Appendix G) and chose words from the word wall to write on their board. Then the class played Wordo following the rules of Bingo. The class practiced the cloze procedure by engaging in covered word activities once a week (Appendix H). During covered word, an overhead transparency with a short story on it was displayed. Throughout the story, words were covered up. Students used context clues to discover the missing word.

Deviations from the plan were made. One element that was added to the plan was ARP. ARP is a computerized test that asks the students comprehensive questions over literature they have read. An element that was deleted from the plan was having the students write articles for our parent newsletter. Initially we felt students could write articles for the weekly parent newsletter. Due to time constraints, this had to be deleted.

Presentation and Analysis of Results

In order to assess the effectiveness of the intervention, the Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA) was re-administered. The students' initial test scores placed 2 reading at level 18, 1 reading at level 20, 4 reading at level 28, 1 reading at level 30, 4 reading at level 38, 4 reading at level 40, and 5 reading at level 44. After the intervention, the students' test scores indicated 1 reading at level 18, 1 reading at level 20, 1 reading at level 28, 4 reading at level 30, 1 reading at level 34, 4 reading at level 40, and 9 reading at level 44. This reflects a 71% increase. Figure 4 details the postintervention scores on the DRA.

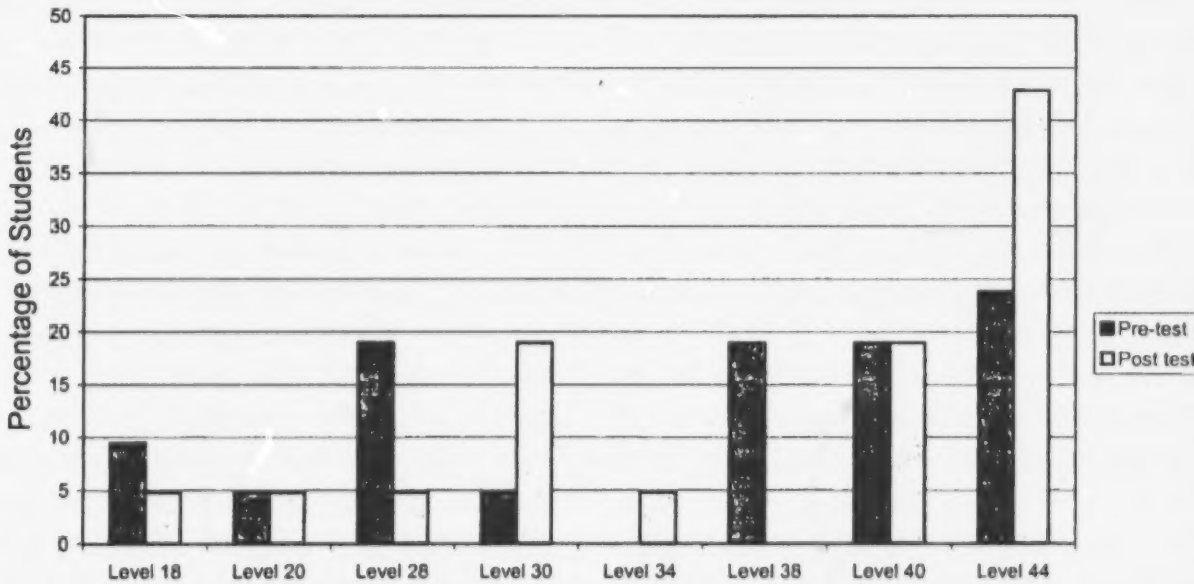

Figure 4 Developmental Reading Assessment Levels

In analyzing the results of the DRA, 5 students had reached the ceiling before the intervention. If the test had a higher ceiling, more students would have

shown growth. Fifteen students moved up a DRA level after the implementation of guided reading. After the intervention, 9 students had reached the ceiling.

Comprehension skills and strategies were taught to develop knowledge, meaning, vocabulary, and oral language. This was accomplished by providing as much instructional-level reading as possible to increase struggling readers' motivation and self-confidence. All types of literature were offered to students. The students were provided weekly opportunities for writing and working with words.

Comprehension skills were increased by the use of ARP and covered word activities. Students took weekly ARP tests on books they had read. They were given incentives when they reached the points set for each quarter. School-wide incentives were bubble gum day, popcorn and juice, and the opportunity to dunk the principal. Students were encouraged to take notes over the books they were reading to assist them while taking the tests. Covered word helped students learn strategies to figure out words they did not understand.

Guided reading allowed the students to be given instruction at their reading level. Students gained confidence and motivation since they were not struggling with difficult literature. A variety of literature types were used to interest the students during guided reading. The word wall was incorporated for working with words. Students used the word wall to assist them while writing.

A posttreatment questionnaire was given to students to allow the researchers to examine if the students' habits and interests had changed. Students indicated they felt more confident sounding out new words. When

asked, "How often do you read?" 100% of the students replied daily at school, while 48% replied daily at home also. Figure 5 indicates the increase in reading time.

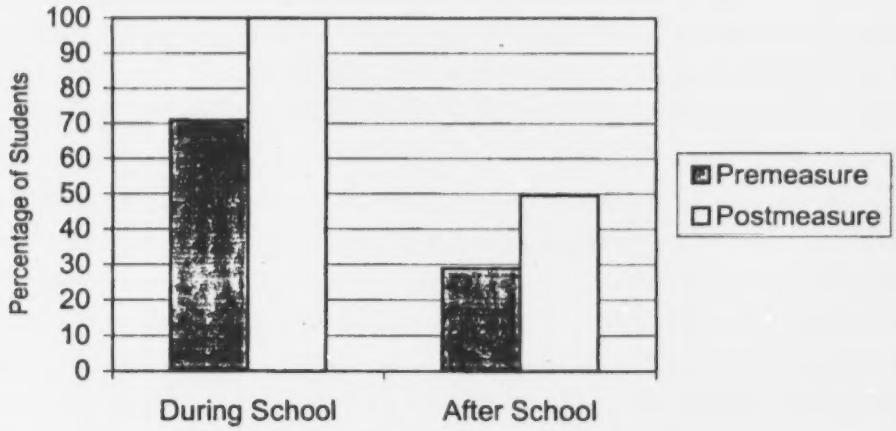

Figure 5 When Students Read

When asked "Does anyone listen to you read?" 71% students responded yes and 29% answered no. Changes occurred from the pretreatment questionnaire. All students responded they liked to read. Reading time at school and home increased.

Reading activities students enjoyed during the intervention were guided reading, silent reading, reading to adults and big word. Students felt their reading skills had improved by reading out loud, reading to someone and spending more time reading. Fifty percent of the students felt they had improved their reading skills by spending more time reading. Twenty-five percent of the students felt that reading out loud to someone had helped them improve.

After the intervention, the researchers decided to review students' reading grades from third grade to see if there was a change in academic behavior. While comparing grades, the researchers discovered that 95% of the students had improved. Students earning an A increased from 25% to 70%; students obtaining a B decreased from 60% to 25%; students achieving a C decreased from 15% to 0%; and students receiving a D increased from 0% to 5%. There were no Fs during either year. Figure 6 indicates the improvement in reading grades.

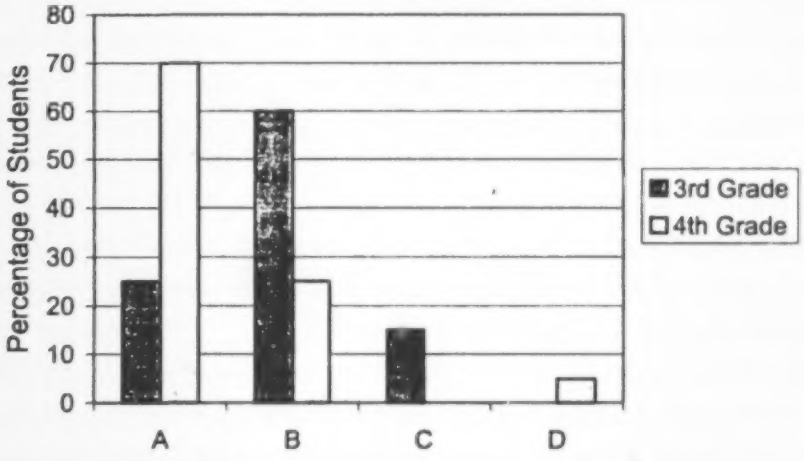

Figure 6 Percentage of Students Earning Reading Grades

Conclusions and Recommendations

After reviewing current research on the topic of guided reading using the Four-Block Framework, the researchers designed an action plan based on improving reading skills. Upon examining results of this project, the researchers found that the students did improve their overall reading skills. This increase can be documented by the overall increase on the DRA. The students increased their

DRA scores by an average of 71%. The researchers found that every child did benefit from the intervention with either small or large gains; each child did demonstrate growth as the weeks progressed. The largest amount of growth was seen in children in the special education program and students who receive Title I services. Ninety-five percent of these students' reading grades improved from last year. The increased exposure to literature heightened their interaction with books. Students demonstrated an improvement in the areas of comprehension, sounding out words, and reading out loud.

The teachers found many strengths in the action plan. Students were engaged in reading experiences with books at their reading level. By reading books at their level, students demonstrated self-confidence and enthusiasm in reading. Students enjoyed time daily for sustained silent reading. Students chose books at their independent reading level during this time. All the students showed interest, while listening to teachers read novels out loud.

Strengths were seen while students participated in literature circles within their guided reading group. Teacher-directed instruction was more effective because of the opportunity to work with a small group and with students who were reading at the same level. Working in small groups made it easier to work on specific skills such as dictionary skills, parts of speech, synonyms, antonyms, and analogies.

Students performing activities in working with words and writing showed improvement. Students practiced using the cloze procedure weekly, and this carried over into daily work. Making big words improved the students' abilities to

creatively construct new words. A word wall was established in the classroom. Weekly targeted words were added to the wall to provide additional support and awareness. Students utilized the word wall during writing activities. Daily oral language gave the students exposure to writing sentences correctly.

A weakness that was noticed in the action plan was lack of time. Time constraints and interruptions in our schedule made it difficult to incorporate all aspects of the Four-Block Framework weekly. Another weakness that was observed was getting students in the routine of using the Four-Block Framework. Beginning the implementation of the action plan later in the school year could have amended this aspect.

A weakness that was observed during sustained silent reading was getting the students accustomed to reading quietly for a period of time. Students were lacking in quality work when we began daily oral language. They progressed over time once they realized the importance of the activity.

During the intervention the following problems may have interfered with the study. There was a lack of parent involvement reading with their children at home. To prepare for a holiday presentation, students practiced singing out of the room three hours a week for five weeks. During this time, the teachers were frustrated trying to incorporate all aspects for the study.

A weakness the researchers found was the existing DRA test had a ceiling that many of the students reached. We recommend teachers use a new DRA test that is currently being published. This will allow teachers to use the DRA with students that are reading at a fourth grade reading level and above.

An adjustment that would have benefited the researchers is to have the action research continue for a longer period of time to allow the comparison of standardized test scores. The local standardized assessment was used as a premeasure, but results were not completed to be used as a postmeasure.

The researchers believe that improving reading skills and instilling the love for reading at an early age build a strong foundation for future reading success. Therefore, the recommendation is for teachers to continue to provide teacher-directed instruction and provide books at all students' reading levels. Educators now know, based on emergent literature research, that when students practice reading daily they gain more self-confidence.

Overall, all children benefited from participation in the action plan. Students with special needs and students who received Title I services exhibited significant growth in motivation and confidence. Informal observations revealed expanded knowledge in vocabulary, choosing appropriate literature, and comprehending what they read.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Pre-Questionaire

1. Do you ever like to read? Yes No

2. What types of literature do you like? (You can mark as many as you'd like.)

____fiction (not true)	____science fiction
____nonfiction (true)	____adventure
____nature	____scary stories
____mysteries	____travel
____magazines	____comic books

3. What books did you read over the summer?

4. How often do you read? ___daily at school
___daily at home

5. Does anyone listen to you read?

6. Do any adults read to you?

7. Name some books you have at home.

8. Name a favorite book.

9. Name a favorite author.

10. What areas do you feel you are successful at in reading? (You can check more than one.)

____reading out loud
____understanding what you read
____sounding out new words
____reading quickly
____reading to yourself
____reading to others
____other_____

11. What areas do you feel are difficult for you? (You can check more than one.)

____reading out loud
____understanding what you read
____sounding out new words
____reading quickly
____reading to yourself
____reading to others
____other_____

Daily Oral Language

1. we goes to school at porta central in petersburg illinois
   (8)

2. porta central
   1500 owen ave
   petersburg il
   62675
   (7)

APPENDIX F

A B C D E F G H

I J K L M N O P Q

R S T U V W X Y Z

WORDO

APPENDIX J

THE INFORMATION CHART

Topic:

Who	What	When	Where	Why

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

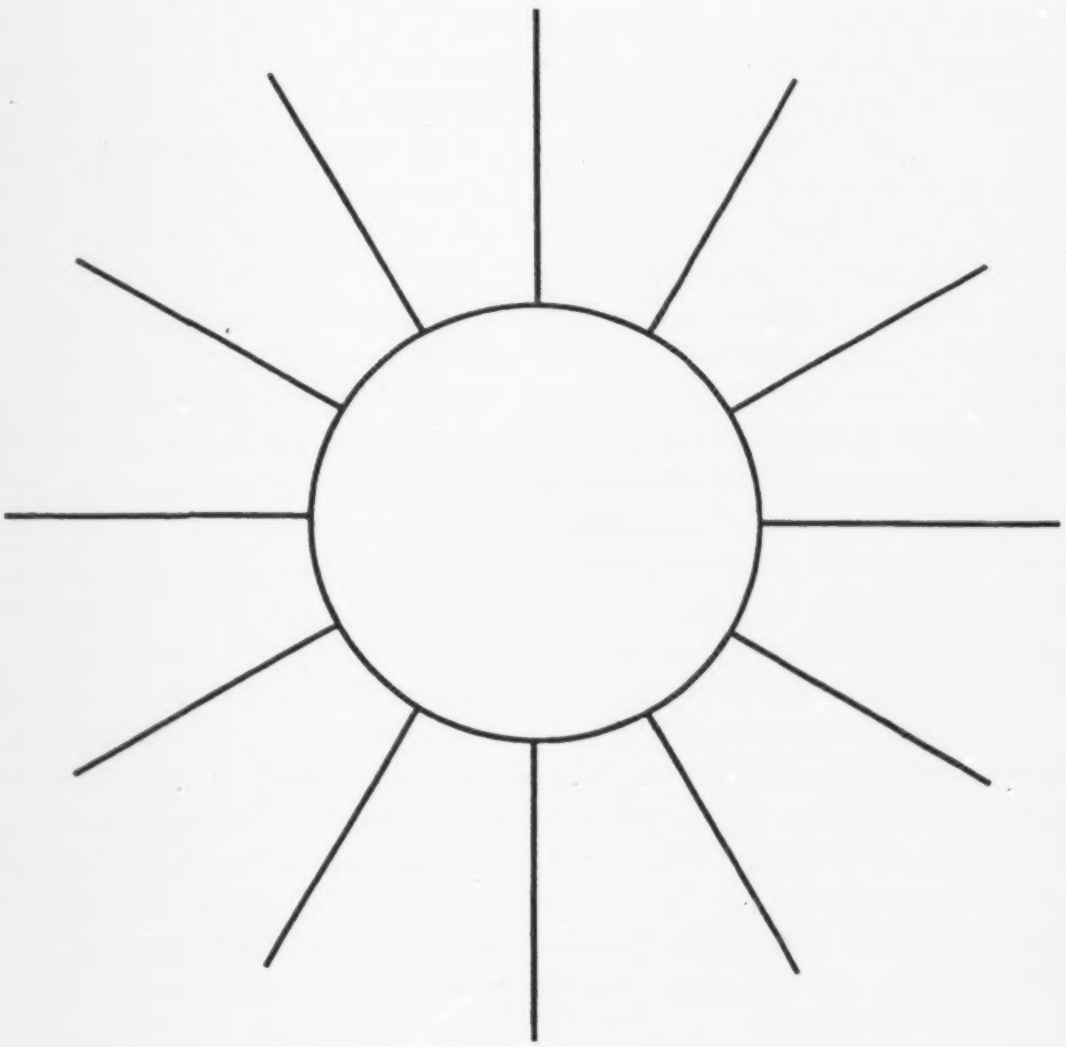
THE PROBLEM-SOLVING CHART

Topic:

I Index the facts as you see them.	
D Define the problem.	
E Expand on ideas or possible alternatives.	
A Adopt a criterion.	
S Select and sell your idea to others involved.	

NAME _____ CLASS _____

THE WEB



Important Elements

Book Title _____

Setting:

The story takes place _____

_____

_____

Evidence: _____

_____

_____

Characters

An important character is _____

Evidence: _____

_____

Another important character is _____

Evidence: _____

_____

Plot:

The problem begins when: _____

_____

_____

Then _____

_____

After that _____

_____

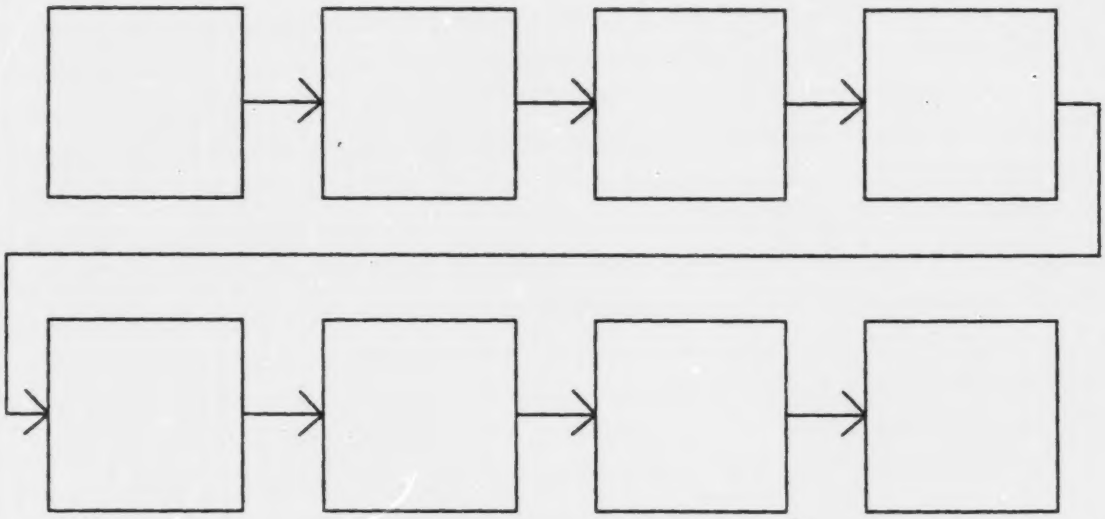
Finally _____

_____ 59 _____

NAME _____ CLASS _____

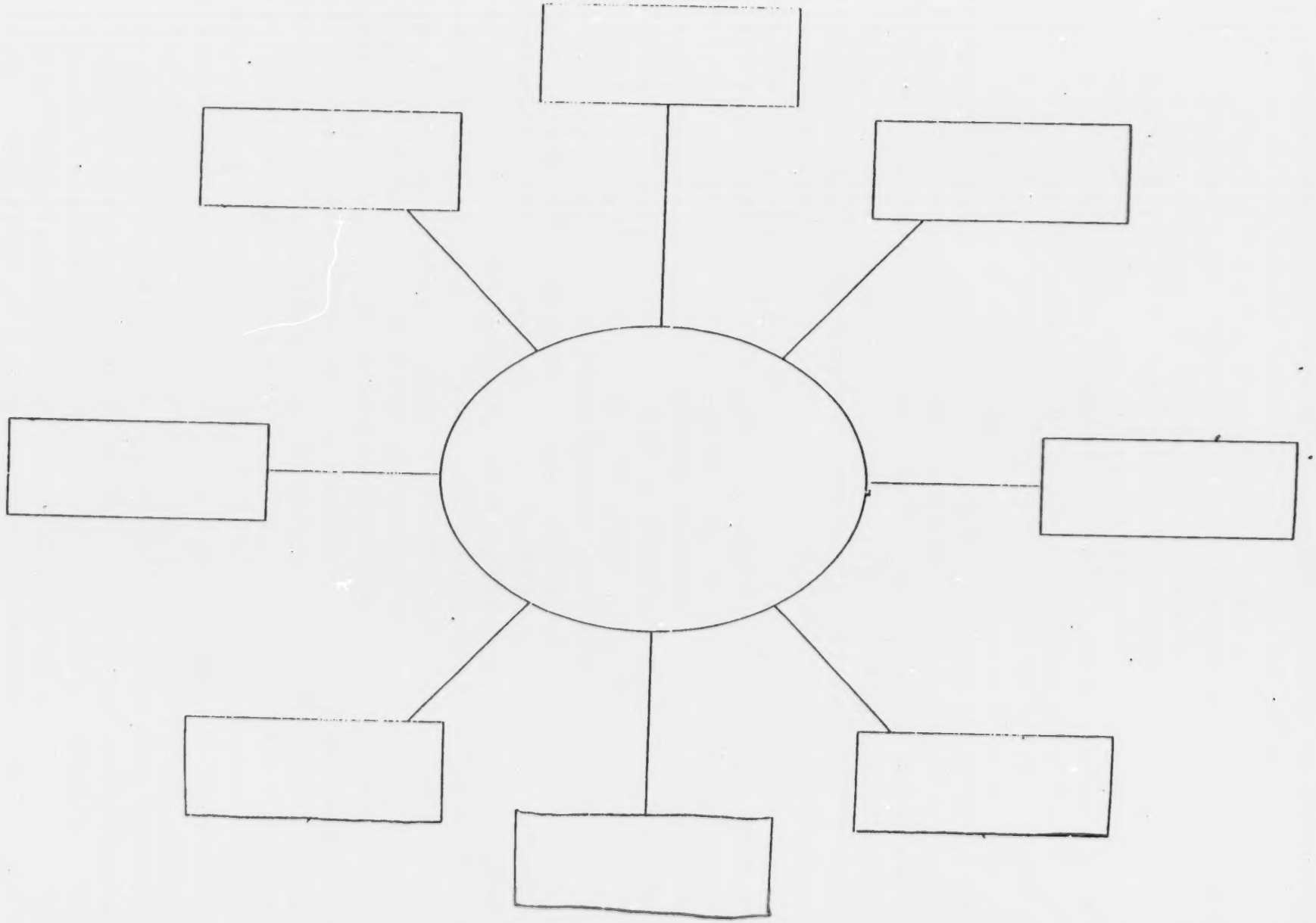
THE SEQUENCE CHART

Problem:



Information Web

Name/s_____



APPENDIX K

Post-Questionaire

1. Do you ever like to read? Yes No

2. What types of literature do you like? (You can mark as many as you'd like.)

____fiction (not true)	____science fiction
____nonfiction (true)	____adventure
____nature	____scary stories
____mysteries	____travel
____magazines	____comic books

3. How often do you read? ___daily at school
___daily at home

4. Does anyone listen to you read?

5. Do any adults read to you?

6. Name some books you have at home.

7. Name a favorite book.

8. Name a favorite author.

9. What areas do you feel you are successful at in reading? (You can check more than one.)

_____reading out loud
_____understanding what you read
_____sounding out new words
_____reading quickly
_____reading to yourself
_____reading to others
_____other_____

10. What areas do you feel are difficult for you? (You can check more than one.)

_____reading out loud
_____understanding what you read
_____sounding out new words
_____reading quickly
_____reading to yourself
_____reading to others
_____other_____

11. What reading activities did you enjoy?

12. How did your reading skills improve?

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